

Benton and Franklin Counties' Leaders Coordinate to Send Open Letter to the Community

August 31, 2021

Our counties are in crisis with COVID raging through our community. The situation is serious, and we need to take immediate action, as a community, to come together to reduce spread. We have reached a point where we cannot vaccinate our way out of the sharp incline we are seeing in cases and hospitalizations. Although vaccination is one of the key strategies to ending the pandemic, it is time for everyone to do whatever they can to stop spread. Everyone.

This past week, our current case rate almost hit 1,000 per 100K individuals over 14 days. The CBC-West community COVID test site hit a record 1,200 tests this past weekend. At a 23% positivity rate, we know they are only catching the sickest individuals. COVID-19 is widespread, and the Delta variant has a high transmission rate with one case potentially infecting up to 4 to 10 other individuals.

The reality is this is a surge of the unvaccinated. Breakthrough cases are occurring at the expected rate, but the vaccine is holding strong in preventing severe illness, hospitalizations, and death.

We desperately need to get our community healthier. Our hospitals are seeing record numbers of unvaccinated COVID patients and struggling to keep up. Breakthrough infections in vaccinated individuals average 5-10% of total tests and, as of the second quarter of this year, only 1 death in our counties was in a vaccinated individual.

There are several ways the community can help to slow spread to decrease our health care burden. We know what works. We have seen cases decline before when masking was implemented last July. We can do it again. The top three ways to get spread under control are:

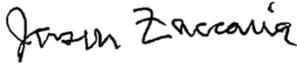
1. **Get Vaccinated:** With 5 billion doses given worldwide, we are confident all three vaccines are safe and effective. Reactions are extremely rare, and reports show many reactions match statistically with what is occurring in the general population not receiving vaccine.
2. **Mask Up:** Masking is now mandated for everyone. Mask indoors when in public, and outdoors when distancing cannot be safely and consistently maintained - vaccinated individuals included.
3. **Gather Safely:** Should you choose to attend large gatherings, which are not currently recommended by public health, choose ones that have vaccination, testing and/or masking requirements. Monitor symptoms for 14 days after and test if you begin having symptoms.

Our ask to the community, **"Any Two Will Do."** We recognize the polarizing nature of the continued state of the pandemic and people wanting to get back to normal. We hear pleas on both sides of the issue. We must recognize the health of our economy is directly tied to the health of our community. If you cannot do all three, "any two will do."

We all want to get back to our former routines. We all want our businesses at capacity, our kids playing sports, and our schools fully open. We all want to feel comfortable at our community events and feel a sense of normalcy in how we socialize. We want to achieve these things safely, with everyone's best interests at heart.

Please, let's all do our part to get spread under control, save our health care system, keep our economy healthy, and protect and save lives. It's up to all of us to do our part not just for ourselves, but for each other.

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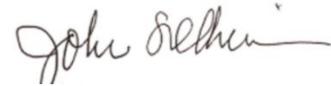
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